

Beethoven

Biddulph
RECORDINGS

Violin Sonatas No.1, 5 & 10



Adolf Busch & Rudolf Serkin

Beethoven

Violin Sonata No.1 in D, Op.12 No.1

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|---|---------------------------------------|------|
| 1 | Allegro con brio | 5:56 |
| 2 | Tema con variazioni: Andante con moto | 6:57 |
| 3 | Rondo: Allegro | 4:53 |

Violin Sonata No.5 in F, Op.24 'Spring'

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|---|------------------------------|------|
| 4 | Allegro | 9:15 |
| 5 | Adagio molto espressivo | 6:38 |
| 6 | Scherzo: Allegro molto | 1:17 |
| 7 | Rondo: Allegro ma non troppo | 6:38 |

Violin Sonata No.10 in G, Op.96

- | | | |
|----|-------------------|-------|
| 8 | Allegro moderato | 11:06 |
| 9 | Adagio espressivo | 6:52 |
| 10 | Scherzo: Allegro | 1:49 |
| 11 | Poco allegretto | 8:31 |

Adolf Busch & Rudolf Serkin

In the second quarter of the twentieth century, one duo stood out as interpreters of the Beethoven and Brahms violin sonatas, as well as those of Bach, Mozart, Schumann, Reger and Busoni. The German violinist Adolf Busch (1891-1952) and the Bohemian pianist Rudolf Serkin (1903-91) met in Vienna in 1920 and, despite the gap in their ages, hit it off immediately. Serkin became almost a son to Busch and his wife Frieda and in 1935 married their daughter Irene.

In 1921 the two men started their sonata collaboration with an all-Beethoven evening in Berlin; and from 1929 they played all their repertoire by heart. Having emigrated to America at the end of the 1930s, they became famous for their performances at Town Hall, New York, Jordan Hall, Boston, and the Library of Congress, Washington DC. Sadly they were able to make only four commercial recordings of Beethoven sonatas. Their first recording together, of the 'little' G major, Op.30 No.3, was made just before the Kreisler/Rachmaninoff version was set down in America; and so HMV never bothered to proceed with the 'make-up' session that was necessary. Kreisler was also chosen to make a complete set of the sonatas with an accompanist, when Busch and Serkin would surely have done a more convincing job. If the existing live recordings could be assembled, a virtually complete set of Busch/Serkin performances would be on the cards.

The present studio performances, adding two sonatas to the canon, were probably the last the duo ever gave. They came in the autumn of 1951, not long after both men were involved in their second summer at the music school at Marlboro, near their homes in Vermont. The first year of the Marlboro summer school in 1950 attracted few students. Among those who attended the 1951 session were the Rosenberg sisters, violinist Sylvia and pianist Irene, and Busch worked with them intensively on Beethoven's Op.12 No.1 and Op.96.

Having recently lost two of his brothers, the actor Willy and the conductor Fritz, Busch was grateful to be able to plunge into work and make what were to prove his own last recordings. They were done in the studio – converted from an old barn – at the house in Dummerston, Vermont which had belonged to the film-maker Robert Flaherty. Working with the full benefit of tape for the first time, Busch found the new process liberating and was delighted to learn from his producer – the clarinettist David Oppenheim – that a trivial mistake could now be corrected by splicing-in part of a new 'take'. He, his cellist brother Hermann and Serkin were equally charmed by Uschi, the black poodle which went everywhere with the engineer Fred Plaut, and was an amazingly quiet presence at the sessions.

With Hermann and Serkin, Busch played Brahms's C major Trio and their favourite Schubert E-flat; and with Serkin

he taped the Beethoven sonatas on which he had worked with the Rosenbergs. The beautiful version of the 'Spring' Sonata (with the exposition repeat) which is reproduced here, from Busch's own acetate copy, seems to have been taped for the artists' edification at a warm-up and microphone balancing session on the first day. An unofficial recording of that kind would have required the complicity of the production team, but relations with the men from Columbia were always relaxed. 'There was no contract as such – it was all very informal', said Oppenheim.

These 1951 recordings found Serkin in terrific form and if Busch's bowing was a shade more tentative than in former years, his musical spirit was undimmed. Working in longer takes helped him and his colleagues to achieve spontaneity and cohesion in their interpretations; and the sessions should have initiated a new era of Busch recordings, for the LP discs which Columbia had introduced. As it was, the Schubert trio became a memorial release, while the Brahms trio and Beethoven's first and last sonatas had to wait decades to be put on to LP. Even then, Op.12 No.1 was issued only in Japan. The 'Spring' is here receiving its first release, while the other two sonatas are being released for the first time on CD.

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All three Beethoven sonatas were recorded in a converted barn at Adolf Busch's home in Dummerston, Vermont, USA. Like many recordings made by artists late in their careers, a recording studio was set up to accommodate the artists and avoid them having to travel. (Wanda Landowska and Vladimir Horowitz's last recordings were also made at their respective private homes.) Furthermore, these recordings were among the first to be made using the relatively new medium of tape instead of lacquer discs. The recording information for the two commercially-released performances is:

Beethoven Sonata No.1 in D, op.12 no.1: Matrix: XLP 8785

Beethoven Sonata No.10 in G, op.96: Matrix: XLP 8786

The previously unissued recording of Beethoven's 'Spring' Sonata comes from acetate discs in the Hedwig Busch Collection. These test pressings were made from the original tape recording. Not only does it sound very similar to the recordings of the other two sonatas, but it also suffers from a similar background hum, caused by the tape transport being in the same room as the performers. It should be noted that this noise stems from the source, not the acetate copy.

Reissue producer: Eric Wen

Transfer engineer: Roger Beardsley

Digital mastering: Dennis Patterson

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